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ABSTRACT

This address by the Oregon State Superintendent of Public Instruction presents proposals for achieving educational excellence. The introduction to the plan briefly discusses the state of school finance, the upcoming property tax relief vote, and the interest indicated in national reports for accelerating school improvement. The eight proposals specifically presented provide for (1) a state-required curriculum, (2) testing of basic skills for all students in the third, sixth, and tenth grades, (3) a state-level eighth-grade examination for all students, (4) increased math and science requirements, (5) development of school profiles, (6) a state honors diploma, (7) state board of education authority over the teacher and administrator evaluation process, and (8) effective use of school time. Other areas mentioned as having priority during the school year are technology, development of public/private partnerships, vocational education, and community colleges. The address concludes with a call to raise expectations for students and educators and to promote educational excellence. (BJD)

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The State of the Schools

Oregon



1983

Verne A. Duncan
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

Text of the Seventh Annual
State of the Schools Address
Portland, Oregon
September 15, 1983

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The time is right to move—and improve—and we shall!

That phrase summarizes what I see as I assess the State of the Schools in Oregon. All of the recent reports on education and the attention they have received have created an atmosphere in which we can make some significant improvements in our education system and take some important steps in our journey toward educational excellence for every Oregon youngster.

The eight-point plan I have proposed in this address will provide a centerpiece for continued movement toward excellence. I encourage each Oregonian to stand up and be counted by letting me know how you feel about these proposals and by offering suggestions for improvements in our schools.

As we work together through this "Oregon Year of the Schools" it is important that all Oregonians participate in the discussions of what it is we expect of our schools and what we are willing to do together to reach those expectations.

Verne A. Duncan
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

This is an exciting year in education. A lot of attention is being focused on schools right now as a result of the various national reports that have been released in the past several months.

While some may be critical of the recommendations in those reports, I think the fact that the nation's attention is focused on education creates a climate in which we can make some changes and improvements that would not have been possible only a year ago.

In a few minutes I will outline some proposals I believe will move us further down the road toward educational excellence.

It is exciting to me that we have the opportunity to make major improvements in our schools, especially this year which has been designated by Governor Atiyeh as the Oregon Year of the Schools.

You will often hear and see the phrase, "Your public schools—There's no better place to learn," during this school year, as that is the theme that has been adopted for the Oregon Year of the Schools. But it is more than just a fancy slogan, more than just a public relations gimmick. Behind that slogan is a full-scale effort in communities throughout Oregon to create an atmosphere in which we as Oregonians can determine what it is we expect of our schools and what we are willing to do together to see that it happens.

There will be community surveys to determine exactly what we think our schools do well and not so well. There will be community activities to provide a chance for Oregonians to find out first hand what their schools are doing and why.

The Year of the Schools provides us with the opportunity to demonstrate that we in Oregon care about our children's future and are willing to provide them with the educational opportunities to make that future a success. I hope each of you will take the opportunity to visit your local school during this year. I think you will find it to be an exciting and vibrant place with children eager to learn and teachers and administrators eager to help them.

It is somewhat ironic that in this Oregon Year of the Schools we need to face the issue of closing down entire school districts due to lack of operating funds. But face it, we must.

School Finance

I think it is apparent by now that our schools have become the bullseye in a shooting gallery created by the Oregon Legislature by its failure to settle the property tax relief question. I am like the person who said of himself, "I'm the world's greatest optimist; I'm just not sure my optimism is justified."

As we meet here today, five days before the elections that will determine whether or not nearly 40 percent of Oregon's school children will be allowed to continue their education for the entire school year, the situation looks grim.

Lincoln County schools are closed! Five thousand children are being denied an education. Fifty-seven other districts, including six of our ten largest, still need levy approval to have the funds necessary to operate during this school year which began just last week. Will we have more school closures? We very well may. And that is a tragedy—a tragedy with long lasting consequences.

What message do we send our children about the importance we place on education? What message do we send to those corporate executives we are trying to attract to Oregon? What message do we send ourselves about our values as a society? The messages are not cause for joy.

There can be no student achievement, no excellence in education if the schoolhouse doors are closed. No Oregon school should ever have to close its doors because of lack of funding! I hope each of us considers the enormity of our responsibility as we go to the polls next Tuesday. And I hope our legislators who are meeting today in special session face up to their responsibility to provide real property tax relief to our citizens and some much needed fiscal stability for our schools.

National Reports

I mentioned the national reports on improving education that have recently been issued. It encourages me that there is so much interest in our schools, for only when people really care can we make things happen. Now is the time to escalate our efforts to improve schools.

That does not mean we have not been working all along to improve our education system. In fact, many of the reports being issued confirm some of the decisions we have made about Oregon education in the past decade.

Oregonians need to know that for the past ten years we have been following a carefully planned course to achieve school improvement. From the moment we stopped evaluating schools on the number of toilets and light fixtures they had and began looking instead at the goals, objectives and expectations of their education programs, we have been constantly upgrading the quality of Oregon education.

Perhaps we have moved too slowly. It has taken a long time to get everyone at all levels thinking along the same track, and we have learned a lot over the past several years from the research about what makes effective teachers and effective schools. I think we have now reached the point where we can accelerate our school improvement efforts and make demonstrable progress through the remainder of this decade. I am here today to announce a proposal for some major changes in Oregon education.

New Proposals

The program I will outline for you is what I will submit to the State Board of Education next week for consideration. Some of the items will require legislative action, both in statute changes and in funding. I will submit those requests to the 1985 session; others can be put into effect sooner, and I will urge rapid action by the State Board.

The program I propose has eight components; although all are related, each is a distinct element necessary to move our education system further toward the excellence of which we are capable.

I shall briefly list the major components, then expand somewhat upon them individually. If my proposals are adopted:

1. We will develop a state required curriculum in all basic academic programs, kindergarten through grade 12.
2. We will administer a state test to every Oregon student in the 3rd, 6th and 10th grades in basic skills.

3. We will institute a state 8th grade examination for all students as they complete their grade school program.
4. We will increase the state graduation requirements in math and science and review all of the current graduation requirements.
5. We will develop a profile on the performance of each school in Oregon as a means of measuring how well they are meeting expectations.
6. We will institute a State Honors Diploma for students reaching a high level of achievement.
7. We will ask the Legislature to give the State Board of Education authority over the teacher and administrator evaluation process.
8. We will extend the school year to 190 days and immediately begin a study of how the school day is currently used, our goal being to increase the amount of productive instructional time in the day.

These reforms, the next steps in our journey toward school improvement and excellence, will not be received without controversy. There will be those who accuse me of abandoning my philosophy of strong local control. However, that is not the case at all.

Oregon's education system is based on a partnership between the state and local levels. The state establishes standards and expectations common to all schools. Local school boards make the very important program and day-to-day operational decisions based upon their community's needs and expectations. The measures I am proposing are not an erosion of local control but rather are means of fulfilling the state's responsibility to see that local control results in local action.

Put simply, I am saying that I will not accept local control as an excuse for inaction. I am afraid that in the past we have occasionally used local control as a cop-out to avoid accountability.

You may recall in my State of the Schools address last year I mentioned an extensive study of the future of Oregon education and the role of the State Department of Education.

We did conduct that study which involved hundreds of citizens, teachers, administrators, parents, business people and others. Many of my proposals are directly related to the findings of that study as well as the recommendations from the various national reports.

Going back to my proposal, I shall expand a bit on each of the recommendations.

1. **State required curriculum.** I want to make it clear that I am not proposing that on the third Tuesday in September every 5th grader in Oregon will be studying exactly the same thing. However, I do believe it is reasonable to have certain expectations statewide about what students should know at each grade level. Most Oregonians probably think this exists now, but it does not. Without at least some measure of consistency, it is virtually impossible to determine how we as a state are doing in our education system and where we might improve. That becomes a very important factor to the Oregon Legislature when you consider that nearly one third of the state's general fund is spent to support elementary and secondary education. This state-required curriculum will address not only basic skills, but the higher order skills our students need in critical thinking, mathematics, science and international studies.
2. **Testing all students at the 3rd, 6th and 10th grades in basic skills.** This state test is in addition to the current State Board requirement that local districts test each child at each grade level. In the past our state tests have been by a sampling method only and have helped to identify general areas of strength and weakness in our programs. By testing each student at these checkpoints and compiling the results by student, school and district as well as statewide and in comparison to national performance, we will be better able to zero in on weaknesses in the individual classroom, school and district and take steps to make improvements.
3. **State 8th grade examination.** This item will probably garner the most attention, and perhaps it should. We need to assure that before our students begin their very serious studies in high school that we have provided them with adequate skills and an appropriate back-

ground throughout the first eight grades. I am not proposing that every student who does not pass the exam be held back, although in some cases that may be the appropriate action.

I am proposing that students who do not meet an acceptable level of performance will enter high school with an education program designed to help them overcome their individual weaknesses. That individual program needs to be developed jointly with the 8th grade staff, the high school staff, and most importantly, the parent or parents of the student. We cannot permit students with basic skill deficiencies to become mired deeper and deeper into educational despair. We cannot set students up to fail. And we all know you cannot succeed if you cannot read.

4. **Increased math and science requirements.** The National Commission on Excellence has recommended three years of math and three years of science for high school graduation. The Oregon Board of Higher Education has recently increased the admission requirements to Oregon colleges and universities to require three years in those subjects. We must remember though that our graduation requirements are for all students, not just the college bound.

While I am more interested in the quality of content than numbers of courses taken, in looking at the knowledge students will need to be successful adults, I believe there is justification for requiring two years of math and two years of science for all Oregon graduates. We currently require one unit of each, and I will recommend to the State Board that those requirements be increased.

5. **Development of school profiles.** These profiles will include such information as student performance, drop-out rates, staff turnover, socioeconomic factors and other items that will allow both the educators and the community to evaluate the effectiveness of the school. Schools will be compared against district and state expectations to determine where improvements can be made. This will be a valuable tool for the building principal and staff to evaluate their own school, and for local school boards as they make program

decisions. It will also be important to me in performing my statutory responsibility to evaluate Oregon schools. We will also use these profiles to identify schools that should be recognized for outstanding achievements. We expect schools to excel; and when they do, they should be recognized.

6. **State Honors Diploma.** I believe it is necessary to recognize students who excel in their school careers. The State Honors Diploma will be awarded to students who meet a rigid set of criteria. These might include four years of English, four years of social studies, three years of math, three years of science, two years of foreign languages and two years in the arts or vocational education. To qualify, students would need a minimum of 24 units of credit with a four-year grade point average of at least 3.2.
7. **Teacher and administrator evaluations.** The current process for teacher and administrator evaluation is laid out in state law where it is rigid, inflexible and difficult to change in the political arena. We will ask that the State Board of Education be given the responsibility for approving evaluation models that meet the teachers' and administrators' needs for self-improvement and the communities' needs for accountability and assurance of quality.
8. **Effective use of school time.** The National Commission on Excellence in Education has recommended a lengthened school day and year as a way to increase the amount of instructional time available to students. My feeling is that we are probably not using the current school day to the best advantage. Time is the most important resource at our disposal, and it costs nothing to use it more productively. During this school year we will study the school day to determine what impact activities such as athletics, other extracurricular activities, and administrative and other disruptions have on actual instructional time. Our goal will be to reduce or eliminate such interruptions in order to provide more productive instructional time each day. I am also proposing that we lengthen the school year to 190 days from the current 175 days as another way of providing our students more instructional time.

I do want to make the point that these proposals should not add a heavy financial burden to local school districts. The proposals are for state requirements, and the state should fund them fully. I shall make that very clear to the Oregon Legislature.

While I believe these proposals will have a significant impact on Oregon education, these steps are by no means all that is being done. Our ongoing efforts in school improvement will continue as they have for many years. Projects in which we have already invested a great amount of time, energy and money such as the science curriculum and testing project, our work in basic skills, global studies and other areas will be incorporated into our accelerated approach to school improvement.

Other Priority Areas

There are a number of other areas I want to single out for attention during this school year. These include the use of existing and new technology, development of a real partnership for education between the public and private sectors, improvements in our high school vocational education programs, and maintaining and improving the capabilities of our community colleges as the primary agents through which our state addresses the rapidly changing economic base upon which we depend.

Technology

You have heard me say before that education missed the boat on using television for instructional purposes. I think we are continuing to underuse what could be a major element in providing access and enrichment to thousands of Oregonians both young and old. I want to make sure that we harness all the communication tools available including satellite transmissions, cable TV access channels and video tapes. We are thirty years late in making this effort, but I don't intend for our education system to enter the second half of the 1980s with a technological approach from the 1950s.

And of course there is the computer. Depending upon what you read or to whom you listen, the personal computer will be either the salvation or the destruction of the American public school system.

Critics point out that the rhetoric about computers revolutionizing education is similar to what was said about television. They do not understand that television did not revolutionize education because we educators did not let it. I intend to see that, in Oregon at least, we do not make the same mistake with computers.

The computer is a tool, like the pencil, and Oregon students need to know how to use the computer to help them in science, math, history, English, music and other subjects. And they need to learn early; so they can use the computer, as they use the pencil, all through their school career, and gain the skills they will need for computer use in the home and workplace.

The National Commission on Excellence has recommended a course in computer science for every high school student. That may be appropriate for those who want more training in computers; but if we wait until high school to introduce our students to the computer, we will have done them a great disservice.

Public/Private Partnership

Another area of concern is the partnership between the public and private sectors. I include myself when I say that educators and business people alike have given this notion little more than lip service in the past. It is time that changed.

My office, and I personally, will be seeking partnerships and joint ventures between the schools and businesses and industries. I may be contacting some of you in this room, when I do, I will be seeking commitments, and I will be willing to make commitments. Both business and education have much to gain by cooperating. Neither sector can afford to let the current relationship, or lack of one, continue to exist.

Vocational Education

Nowhere in the school program is private/public cooperation more important than in vocational education. It is essential that we get our vocational teachers back into industry and get industry people into our classrooms. Most importantly, we must get our students into both the classrooms and the workplace.

For quite some time, companies have donated their used equipment to schools for classroom training. But used equipment is no longer adequate. If we continue in that mode, what we will have are students entering the marketplace with skills in the operation of obsolete equipment. That does not do anyone any good.

Obviously with educational funding the way it is, schools and community colleges cannot equip themselves with the latest technology used in the private sector. It is imperative that we work out agreements so that our students will have access to appropriate equipment and technology. Perhaps we need some incentives for businesses to get involved. I shall promote and support legislation to provide tax credits or whatever is necessary to encourage cooperation between the public and private sectors.

Another problem that exists in vocational education is the lack of joint programs between high schools and community colleges. We absolutely must strengthen the ties between those programs. One of my priorities this year is to break down the bureaucratic obstacles that prevent it from happening. We may need to step on a few toes to overcome those hurdles, but I am willing to do that.

Community Colleges

I have often said that I believe our community colleges are the key to helping our citizens adjust to the changes occurring in the marketplace.

Much attention has focused on higher education and programs for advanced scientists, mathematicians and researchers, and I support that effort. Our colleges and universities should be top

rate to accommodate those needs. But the fact is, the majority of jobs that will be created, even in the hi-tech industries, will be production and service jobs.

The majority of the workers who will need training for those jobs in our information and service-oriented economy are people who are currently in the workforce, in many cases working in jobs that will become obsolete.

I firmly believe that as our society continues to move from an industrial base to a service and information-based economy, our number one domestic priority will be the training and retraining of the American workforce. The only institution with the capability to accomplish that task, the only institution with the flexibility to meet the changing needs of the marketplace, is the community college.

We in Oregon have some of the finest community colleges in the nation, and they are proving themselves on a daily basis. Whether they are training a new workforce for new companies, such as Wachter and Siltec, or retraining laid-off workers as Chemeketa Community College did after the Boise Cascade shutdown in Salem, our community colleges are helping Oregonians and Oregon business climb out of the economic doldrums. They are accomplishing this while continuing to meet the needs of our citizens for lower-level collegiate programs and self-improvement courses.

I told the Ways and Means Committee during this past legislative session that government has very few programs which can be called unqualified successes. But I believe the Oregon community college program, which has been referred to as an educational supermarket, comes closer to being an unqualified success than any government program I have ever seen.

Educational Excellence

During the past twenty minutes or so I have mentioned many specifics—curriculum, 8th grade exams, additional testing, school profiles, etc. It is necessary to remind ourselves that these are the nuts and bolts of a larger effort, that of achieving excellence in Oregon education. When I say excellence, I am not just referring to the top academic

performers in our schools. By excellence I mean that every youngster should have the opportunity to succeed to her or his highest potential. That means excellence in our programs for the handicapped as well as the talented and gifted, in vocational education and the arts as well as in math and science.

In its report, "A Nation at Risk," the National Commission on Excellence in Education pointed out that a student forfeits the opportunity for success if she or he does not give the best effort possible in attaining an education. In my response to the Commission's report I have written that if we as educators do not give our very best in providing challenges and opportunities for these students, then we contribute to limiting our students' chances of success.

I call upon all of us in education to redouble our commitment and effort—to raise our expectations for our students and ourselves—to challenge our students to do their very best.

Fortunately, here in Oregon we have a tremendous group of people who are committed to helping students reach their potential. I refer of course to the 25,000 classroom teachers to whom we give the awesome task of educating all of our children.

I know you hear about the occasional bad teacher, and in no way will I defend anything less than high quality teaching. Even though one bad teacher is too many, it is unfortunate that we sometimes let that one discolor our view of the entire teaching profession. I am in classrooms in schools all over the state every week, and I can report to you firsthand that Oregonians can be proud of the committed, creative and concerned people who teach in our classrooms. I urge every Oregonian who doubts what I say to visit a classroom in their local school. I think they will find the real world is much better than the version often portrayed.

Of course the critical factor in a student's ability to achieve is the parents—the children's first and most influential teachers. Over and over again the research shows that those students whose parents take an active interest in their education tend to achieve consistently higher. I have mentioned the role of the parent in every State of the Schools address I have given, and I cannot overemphasize the importance of showing our children that we

think learning is important. The responsibility rests on both the schools and the parents to develop strong ties between them.

Along this same line I want to mention a positive change I have noticed in the past few years in student behavior. Although there is still room for improvement, today's Oregon students seem to be better disciplined than those of only a few years ago. This is attributable partly to a change in parental and student attitudes about discipline and partly to clearer behavioral expectations in the schools. Teachers should not have to tolerate unruly or disruptive students in classrooms or on the school premises. I am encouraged by the trend I have observed, and it must continue.

As I consider the state of the schools in Oregon, I know that our public schools are doing a better job of educating more children than at any other time in our history. I also know that most people do not believe that. I hope that some of the steps I have outlined for you today will provide more accountability and the means to measure the performance of our schools that will show just how well we are doing.

As I was working with my staff in preparing my recommendations to the State Board, someone asked me with what state I would be willing to trade education systems. After giving that a great deal of thought, I've come to the conclusion that I would not trade Oregon education for any program in the nation. If our citizens will take the opportunity in this "Year of the Schools" to find out what really is happening, I am confident they will arrive at the same conclusion.

This year has the potential to become a landmark year in Oregon education. I find that exciting. The climate exists to make major strides toward achieving the excellence we all desire. I do not intend to let the opportunity slip through our grasp.

The time is right to move—and improve—and we shall.

I have proposed a program that will build upon the successes of our past and accelerate our efforts to achieve excellence, a goal from which we must not be deterred.

Even amid the criticism and the fiscal crises we face, or perhaps because of them, I sense a deep commitment to education and a willingness among Oregonians to do what must be done to fulfill our expectations.

I am excited, enthusiastic and anxious to get on with the task. I hope our citizens will share my excitement and enthusiasm during this Oregon Year of the Schools, and I hope that by the end of this school year we all will be able to say with conviction that we have moved closer to our goal, and excellence in Oregon education is truly within our grasp.

Thank you.

For further information, contact:

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Oregon Year of The Schools

Your public schools... There's no better place to learn.